

STAFFORD COUNTY
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION MINUTES

February 18, 2010

I. Call to Order

Chair Danielle Davis called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the County Administration Conference Room in the Administration Center, 1300 Courthouse Road.

II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Danielle Davis, Alicia Knight, Ed Sullivan, Jim Minor and Robert Thomas, Jr. Also in attendance were Marie Schuler representing Comcast and Paul Miller with Verizon. Michele Lansford, Public Information Office, and Jason Hill with the Department of Information Technology represented the County.

III. Presentations by the Public

There were no members of the public present (Ms. Pamela Haines made a presentation later during the meeting under “New Business”).

IV. Approval of November 2009 Minutes

Mr. Minor moved to approve the January 2010 minutes with corrections; Mr. Thomas seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

V. Members’ Concerns

Ms. Knight said she wanted to correct information that appeared in the January 2010 minutes – all PEG fees should be used for capital expenditures, rather than broadcasting and taping the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission meetings.

She asked Ms. Schuler for an update on the Wittmore’s problem. She responded that the technicians had to disconnect service to the house to correct the issue, but then returned at a later date to re-connect service. She said a installation of the new line will involve boring underneath the road, that the bad weather had delayed the work, and that the work order is in the queue.

Ms. Knight complimented Comcast for quickly restoring Internet, cable and cell phone service that went out during one of the recent blizzards. She said that although citizens were routed to a call center in Texas whose representatives didn’t understand the weather conditions, when she called and explained the problem, the representatives responded quickly.

Mr. Minor asked Ms. Schuler for an update on Mr. Rakes request to have service provided in his Widewater neighborhood. She responded that technicians will survey the area, and she will keep Mr. Minor and Mr. Rakes informed.

Ms. Davis asked Mr. Miller about the status of 2077 Courthouse Road, whose residents are requesting FiOS service. He said there had been a delay, but that the engineers are checking on it.

VI. Agenda Additions

There were no additions to the agenda.

VIII. New Business

Ms. Davis requested that Cathy Riddle provide, at the meeting in March, a complete accounting of all expenditures of PEG fees over the last 12 months. She then asked Mr. Hill how long it will take IT staff to convert the online franchise agreements into searchable databases; he responded eight to 10 hours; she directed him not to undertake the project yet.

Ms. Davis will distribute a draft PowerPoint presentation to all members by e-mail for their input in anticipation of making a presentation to the Board of Supervisors about the commission's mission, vision and goals.

Charter Revision

A discussion ensued during which several changes to the charter were made, chief among them a request for authorization from the Board of Supervisors for Telecommunications Commissions members to act as formal liaisons/advisors to the Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority as they plan for telecommunications towers and technology zones.

The marked-up document will be available at the meeting in March for final approval.

Public Access Channel

Ms. Knight introduced Pamela Haines who explained to the commission the process to form a 501C-3 for public access programming. She said that a board of directors should be set up, that the process could take as long as six months, and that the cost would be approximately \$1,300. She asked for an MOU with the commission, to which Ms. Davis responded that the nonprofit is totally separate from the County and the commission. She suggested that Ms. Haines work with the board of directors, take care of all the details, and then approach the County for an MOU.

Ms. Knight commented that all PEG fees from cable subscribers should be made available to the 501C-3. She said that she has volunteers ready to produce programming and supply "canned" videos, but that the problem is uploading the programming to the public access channels. She said she and Ms. Haines are developing a business plan, and hope to begin raising money and applying for grants soon.

Ms. Haines suggested that Stafford could “piggyback” on an operating 501C-3 in Annandale, Va., since the IRS wants to see some activity prior to issuing an EIN tax identification number for the new nonprofit.

Ms. Davis reiterated that neither the County government nor the Telecommunications Commission could advise on the matter, that it is outside the commission’s scope of authority.

Ms. Knight and Mr. Sullivan discussed using the studios in a local high school. He said that the equipment at the school is funded by federal money, and that there are restrictions about who can use the equipment and for what purpose. He said he will check into the matter further.

Ms. Davis commended Ms. Haines for her hard work and for all the hours she has spent researching and providing information about the venues through which public access programming can be provided. However, Ms. Davis respectfully requested that Ms. Haines return to the Commission a plan on the setup of the 501C-3.

Ms. Davis requested through Paul Miller that a meeting be set up with Verizon representatives and commission members to view service area maps for Stafford County. He said he will forward the request to Denise Reedy, and provide Ms. Davis with her contact information.

Mr. Miller said that Ms. Reedy will represent Verizon at all further meetings. Ms. Davis thanked him for his help resolving issues involving his company, and said the commission appreciates the fact that he educated the members about FiOS services. Everyone wished him the best of luck in his future endeavors.

Broadband

Ms. Davis requested that Ms. Riddle provide an e-mail about where Stafford County falls in the federal and state definition of “rural” as it concerns broadband service.

Ms. Knight suggested that the County investigate wireless providers to determine which of them might be interested in providing the service, and said that a telecommunications attorney could prove valuable to Stafford at this point. She said that the Telecommunications Commission generates money for the county through telecommunications taxes which could be invested in contracts with wireless providers.

Ms. Davis told Ms. Lansford that the commission members want to review the RFP for the contract currently held by VTS to provide broadcasting and taping services (before it is issued).

IX. Adjournment